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Statement from Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Closing Meeting
of the
Second Regular Session of the 1994 UNICEF Executive Board

New York
29 April 1994

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FOR INFORMATION

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
1994 Second Regular Session

Statement by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Closing Meeting
of the
Second Regular Session of the 1994 Executive Board

New York - 29 April 1994

In a few minutes, this Second Regular Session of the 1994 Executive Board will come to a close. It has been a week of intense activity, of businesslike and productive work. I want to thank our Chairperson, Anna Semamba Makinda, for the graceful, efficient and wise way she presided over our deliberations -- and thanks to the Vice-Chairmen of the Board for their helpful assistance.

We have, I believe, started well with the new format and arrangements for our meetings. Discussion has been rich; we have taken care of the business at hand with reasonable dispatch and a high sense of responsibility. There has been a great deal of fruitful dialogue between Board and Secretariat on substantive but also several important procedural issues. The participation of Observer delegations and sister U.N. agencies has, as always, been active and helpful. The contribution of the National Committees for UNICEF to the discussion on private sector fundraising was an important one.

You have approved 17 full Country Programmes and six short term programmes. In addition, a considerable number of short term "bridging programmes" were approved, aimed at harmonizing our programmes with government development plans and the programme cycles of sister U.N. agencies. Millions of children in every part of the world will benefit from these country programmes -- and from the many observations and suggestions you have made during our deliberations. I can assure you that your Secretariat will take very seriously the comments, criticisms and recommendations you have made over the past week.

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Several delegations expressed the view that the current arrangements for reviewing country programme recommendations still need improvement. We look forward to discussing, at the first regular session of 1995, ways to make this important process even more meaningful. One possibility would be for all Board members who so desire to become involved in the process at an earlier stage, helping with actual programme design at the country level rather than waiting to receive the final recommendation from the Secretariat just prior to the Board meeting. Certainly this would make for a more dynamic and participatory process -- provided, of course, that the government of the country concerned was willing.

You have approved a new policy and six new programme proposals for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Baltic States. As you know, these remain at modest levels. But we are aware that the magnitude of the social crisis in the region demands a greater response. Thus, we have agreed to set up, as soon as our budgetary process permits, a regional support team located within the region, making such arrangements as may be necessary during the interim. I am confident that the new regional approach will enable UNICEF to leverage our limited resources in the countries in transition into a presence of lasting benefit to its children. And I am certain that our increasing collaboration with the rest of the U.N. system in the region will heighten the impact of the efforts of all the agencies involved.

It was gratifying to hear from so many delegations a strong reaffirmation of the global scope of UNICEF's mission, and -- at the same time -- an equally strong reaffirmation of our longstanding consensus that UNICEF's continued priority must be the developing countries, with Africa as the priority within the priority. Increased work in the countries in transition must not be -- will not be -- at the expense of assistance to the children of Africa, Asia and Latin America, where poverty and underdevelopment remain far more severe and widespread.

You have endorsed the recommendations contained in the reports of the WHO/UNICEF Joint Committee on Health Policy (JCHP) and the UNESCO/UNICEF Joint Committee on Education, as "guidelines for programming and for coordination and cooperation" between UNICEF and the two sister agencies. By approving new criteria for membership in both bodies, you have given these important inter-agency committees your strong vote of confidence. The JCHP and JCE are providing vital technical support to the global push toward reaching the World Summit for Children goals.

You have given us important guidance on HIV/AIDS. We wholeheartedly agree with the sense of the debate that UNICEF should continue and intensify its efforts focussed on AIDS prevention among youth and women, and on mitigating the impact of the pandemic on children, families and communities. As part of these efforts, we intend to continue to work closely with our partners in the UN system towards establishing a UN programme on AIDS that will build on and multiply the strengths throughout the system required for an adequate multi-sectoral response. And a far greater response is urgently needed. As you heard during the informal session on Monday morning, HIV/AIDS is threatening hard-won gains in child survival in a number of countries. A new study by the U.S. Census Bureau -- reported in today's New York Times -- predicts that, unless there is a sharp decline in the rate of infection, HIV/AIDS will cause dramatic increases in childhood mortality levels -- a tripling in some cases -- in sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, Thailand and Haiti, by the year 2010. This, of course, underscores not only the need for increased effective attention to HIV/AIDS, but also the imperative in these countries of achieving those World Summit goals such as for ORT which drastically reduce child mortality.

I am certain that our deliberations here this week -- and those to come at the Annual Session -- will contribute to the upcoming ECOSOC debate. Your Secretariat believes that a revitalized ECOSOC can bring the system together around a common vision of sustainable human development -- including, where possible, around common goals and strategies -- that will make collaboration among its members more meaningful and effective.

The Board has reaffirmed its support for our International Child Development Centre in Florence. As many delegates said, this new institution has proven its worth as an action-oriented global think-tank on children's and broader development issues in only a few short years.

You have approved the reports and plans of our Greeting Card and Related Operations (GCO). I am certain that we will continue to see a steady increase in private sector income. The growing proportion of our income that comes from private sources points to an important truth that we must not lose sight of, especially in this time of rising xenophobia and intolerance in some areas: more and more people recognize that we are living in a global village and that we are all affected by the problems of our neighbours, even if they live half-way round the world. In our time, the greater part of solidarity is simple prudence.

I was pleased at the positive feedback that emerged from our deliberations and informal consultations on UNICEF's recently-launched Management Study. You will be receiving a status update at the September Regular Session and, early next year, the completed study and recommendations. We are very excited about this process that, I am quite sure, will have an important impact on UNICEF's activities over the next 10-15 years.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to the 1994 edition of the Proposals for Supplementary Funding -- what we call the "Sales Book". The 550 proposals, mostly multi-year, for 111 countries and 24 sub-regional, regional and interregional programmes and projects it describes are a vital part of our efforts to assist children and women throughout the developing world. They complement our regular programmes and have been approved by the Executive Board. The total funding sought for these programmes and projects amounts to US\$2.2 billion over the period 1994-1998. Of special note this year is the increased emphasis on achieving mid-decade goals, as stepping-stones toward reaching the year 2000 goals set at the World Summit for Children. Donors will find in this volume much that captures their imaginations and stimulates their generosity. Contributing to these programmes is also an excellent way to help balance the donors' side of the 20/20 equation.

In closing, I want to share with you a thought-provoking comment from three young girls -- daughters of several UNICEF colleagues -- who sat in on Board deliberations yesterday, which was "Take Your Daughter to Work Day". As they followed the debate, they kept count of the number of times the word "children" was mentioned -- I am not sure of their tally, but the impression they got was that children, the subject and object of all that we at UNICEF are about, were mentioned rather infrequently. And naturally it puzzled them. Well, I'm not in a position to verify their troubling observation, but let us all -- Secretariat and Board alike -- take it as a friendly bit of lobbying by children on behalf of children, to make our deliberations ever more relevant to the lives, concerns, rights and needs of real children everywhere. Quite apart from word counts, we can always do more, and do better, for these precious pieces of future we call children.

In closing, I remind us that during the five days of our meeting, some 175,000 children under the age of five died, two thirds of readily preventable causes -- more than all the deaths at Hiroshima... more than the 100,000 deaths in Rwanda that shocked the world during the past two weeks. This lends a sense of great urgency to our work here this week, and to next week's Annual Session.

I look forward to our Annual Session, during which we will focus mostly on policy and strategy issues. Together with this week's constructive session, I trust that the annual meeting will inspire us all to greater and more urgent action for the world's children in the critical weeks, months and years ahead.